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AMERICAN STUDIES ON THE CHINESE MAINLAND

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OVERVIEW

American Studies is the most prosperous area of international studies in China. As in other countries, universities constitute the major force. In most universities, American literature and culture are researched and taught in English departments, American history in history departments, Sino-US relations in political science departments, and so on. This means American Studies is usually conducted in separate university departments and is not treated as an independent discipline.

Some important universities, however, do have research centers that are entirely devoted to American Studies. The major ones include Fudan University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Nanjing University, Nankai University, Xiamen University and Northeast Normal University. American Studies centers in these universities offer both Masters and PhD degree programs that generally take interdisciplinary approaches in their curriculum and research. The American Studies Center at Beijing Foreign Studies University is a good example. The following is a list of courses offered by the Center:

Philosophy	Western Philosophy, Western Thinking and Academic Writing, American Philosophy, Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons
History	Survey of American History, Important Issues in American History, Post-war American History, Social History of the United States, American Diplomatic History, Post-war American Diplomatic History, American Intellectual History, Approaches of American History, American Religion
Political Science	American Political Institutions, American Government, Current Issues in International Politics, US-East Asia Relations, International Relations, American Constitution, Cross-Border Issues, Social Legislation, American Foreign Policy, Constitutional Law



Sociology	American Culture and Society, Post-war American Society, American Social Institutions, Social Theory, American Social Problems, Myths of America, American Social Movements, American Ethnicity, Comparative Social Institutions, Chinese American Experience, Technology and American Society
Literature	American Literature, Afro-American Writers, Asian-American Writers
Economy	Issues in American Economic Development, American Economic History
Interdisciplinary	Sociology of American Literature, Language and Culture, Understanding America, International Relations and Media, American Education, Women's Studies, Post-colonial Culture, Popular American Culture, Myths in American Culture
Methodology	Introduction to American Studies, American Mass Media: Issues and Methods, Research Methodology

Besides universities, American Studies is also an important area for many provincial academies of social sciences. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is home to an independent and influential American Studies center. American Studies scholars on the Chinese mainland have established their own research organizations, the most important four being the American History Research Association of China, the China Association for the Study of American Literature, the Chinese Association for American Studies, and the Chinese Association for Sino-US Relations Research. Each of these organizations hosts a conference every year or every two years.

American Studies in China concentrates on US history, literature, foreign diplomacy (including Sino-US relations), politics, media and culture, economy and trade. Interests in other fields such as US philosophy and religion are also growing. Research papers in American Studies are published in university journals, specialty journals such as *World History*, *Modern International Relations*, and *Foreign Literatures*, etc., and comprehensive humanities or social sciences journals. The only journal that is entirely devoted to American Studies is the *American Studies Quarterly*, sponsored by the Institute for American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

STUDY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE ON THE CHINESE MAINLAND

1) HISTORICAL REVIEW

The study of American literature in China has made great strides during the last three decades. The serious study of American literature was marked by the establishment of the China Association for the Study of American Literature in 1979 in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. Since then, there has been a national conference held every two years and many symposiums held between, drawing thousands of scholars and students from all over China.

The flourishing of the field can also be seen in the following aspects. First, American literature courses have appeared in almost every curriculum of English departments both on the undergraduate and graduate levels. If before the 1980s Chinese scholars

and students of American literature only studied mainstream white male writers, they now began to explore the real meaning of being an American. In that sense they began trying to understand the issue of American identity, or rather the many identities that make up a diverse and complex history and nation. Therefore, especially on the graduate level, courses covering various periods, themes, and genres began to be offered. These courses invite students to view the American experience through the eyes of Americans of different birth, color, sex and religion. A more comprehensive picture of American literature is now presented to Chinese students and readers. Second, in the last three decades, a great number of works of American literature have been either reprinted or translated. In the early 90s, Chinese students often had to share books in class. The situation has now greatly improved. In bookstores nowadays, works and anthologies of American literature in both English and Chinese are no longer a rarity, providing Chinese readers with an overview of the evolution of American literature and culture and enhancing their understanding of the United States. Third, what is most remarkable about the discipline is the mushrooming of American literary scholarship. During the last three decades, a large number of monographs and articles on American literature have been published. Compared with the publications of thirty years ago, studies in American literature have shown considerable improvement both in scope and depth.

2) CURRENT SITUATION

The following characteristics mark the study of American literature in China today. First, even with the flourishing of the field, Chinese scholars (especially those in provincial universities) are often restricted by limited sources in their study and teaching of American literature. This explains why many scholars there would concentrate in their study on certain areas of American literature, for example 20th-century American writers instead of those from the 19th or 18th centuries, canonical writers instead of those less well-known to Chinese scholars. Even though the study of ethnic writers has become the trend, Chinese scholars tend to focus on the famous few, whether these be authors from the white mainstream or various ethnic groups. For instance, writers like Hemingway and Toni Morrison have received much attention, while some other writers are not studied adequately. Second, many Chinese scholars of American literature are professors in Chinese departments. A large number of them do not have a good command of English and depend on the translation of foreign literary works. Since not all the translations are in high quality, these scholars are, if I may say so, twice removed from the original texts. Finally, global cultural and economic systems have brought a rethinking of the traditional themes and texts and a redefinition of traditional notions of literature and culture. The very way that meaning is made is changing, and this change is reflected even in the basic academic disciplines. New critical methods and new theories of literature and culture have appeared and are transforming literary and cultural studies. There have been more dialogues between Chinese scholars and the outside academic world and Chinese scholars have benefited from the continuing interaction. In a period of thirty years, Chinese scholars have



made great progress in these fields and Chinese scholars are becoming more integrated into the literary world outside of China.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

With the rapid development of the study of American literature in China, the following two cautions are suggested. First, interdisciplinary study in China should be promoted and emphasized. Chinese scholars of literature should read more about American history, society and culture in addition to works of American literature in order to have a better understanding of that literature. It is the trend now that disciplinary boundaries are being redrawn, and new kinds of material enter traditionally well-defined fields. Literary texts are studied in relation to texts from popular culture, and both are studied in relation to the cultural conditions that they reflect and to a broad range of philosophical theories. We hope to envision a new future for the reading of texts of all forms: theoretical, poetic, narrative, dramatic, artistic, cultural, historical, religious, and technological. In this way, scholars of American literature can exchange views with scholars of different disciplines and their horizons can be further broadened. Second, the study of American literature in China should be placed in the context of Chinese culture. A Chinese perspective should be developed gradually and the mere imitation of American scholarship should be avoided. Some of the issues that could be raised are: How are familiar texts of American literature and culture to be read in the new context of 21st-century America and China? What are the common concerns of literary and cultural scholarship in China and the United States? What are the differences? How have literatures, arts, and thought been conceptualized and taught across cultures? What perspectives on these issues might scholars from China offer to the world?

We hope to open new avenues of cooperation and mutual understanding between Chinese scholars and scholars of other countries. It is time for us to share our findings toward a more comprehensive mapping of the American literary and cultural landscape.